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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted through the School of External Studies and Continuing Education at the University of Queensland in 1985 to ascertain the extent of foreign language teaching at a distance in Australian higher education institutions, and to seek information on a wide range of services and facilities provided to students. Of the 868 students surveyed, 358 (41%) responded to questions presented under the headings of General Information, Student Characteristics, Course Information, Seminar/Tutorial Attendance, Library Facilities, Study Centers, Assignments, Method of Assessment, Teaching, Objectives, and Assessment of Courses and Comments. Students were invited to comment on any aspect of their courses and to express their opinion on the efficacy of teaching languages at a distance. Data on programs in 14 languages at six universities and the students enrolled in them are presented in 27 tables with a minimum of interpretative comment. (DB)

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Distance Language Learning

A Survey of Students Enrolled in Language Courses at a Distance in Australian Higher Education Institutions in 1985

Sylvia J. Williams and Pramod C. Sharma

University of Queensland

LR014842

April 1988
Number 12

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Contents

1	Introduction		1
2	Survey Scope and Distribution		2
3	Survey Analysis		4
4	Survey Results		4
	4.1 Profile of Institutions		4
	4.2 Student Profiles		7
	4.2.1	Enrolment Status	7
	4.2.2	Nationality	7
	4.2.3	Sex	7
	4.2.4	Age	9
	4.2.5	Previous Highest Qualifications	12
	4.2.6	Occupation	13
	4.2.7	Previous Enrolment	14
	4.2.8	Reasons for Enrolling Externally	15
	4.2.9	Previous Exposure to Languages	16
	4.3 Course Materials		19
	4.4 Facilities and Support Services		21
	4.4.1	Seminars and Tutorials	23
	4.4.2	Teletutorials	24
	4.4.3	Study Centres	25
	4.4.4	Teacher Contact	25
	4.4.5	Libraries	25
	4.5 Students' Evaluation of Courses		25
	4.5.1	Workload	25
	4.5.2	Assignments	26
	4.5.3	Method of Assessment	26
	4.5.4	Evaluation of Subject Components	26
	4.5.5	Language Practice	26
	4.6 Students' Assessment of their Achievement in Acquiring Language Skills		27
	4.7 Students' Appraisal of the Institutional Procedures		28
	4.8 Students' Appraisal of Distance Language Learning		29

Distance Language Learning

A Survey of Students Enrolled in Language Courses at a Distance in Australian Higher Education Institutions in 1985

1 Introduction

A survey was conducted through the School of External Studies and Continuing Education at the University of Queensland in 1985 to ascertain the extent of foreign language teaching at a distance in Australian higher education institutions and to seek information concerning a wide range of services and facilities provided to students. Students were invited to comment on any aspect of their courses and to express their opinion on the efficacy of teaching languages at a distance.

This publication is a summary data paper intended to provide information for wide dissemination with a minimum of interpretative comment.

2 Survey Scope and Distribution

All Australian tertiary institutions offering modern languages externally in 1985 were covered by the survey and these institutions, along with the degrees or diplomas they offered, are set out below.

TABLE 1

Modern Language Courses Offered Externally at Australian Tertiary Institutions in 1985

INSTITUTION	DEGREE OR DIPLOMA	LANGUAGE
University of Queensland, QUEENSLAND (UQ)	BA	French German Japanese
Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, QUEENSLAND (DDIAE)	Associate Diploma in Asian Studies	Indonesian
Macquarie University, NEW SOUTH WALES (MACQ)	BA	Croatian Macedonian Polish Serbian Ukrainian
University of New England, NEW SOUTH WALES (UNE)	BA	French German Italian Modern Greek
Murdoch University, WESTERN AUSTRALIA (MURD)	BA	Malay/Indonesian
Western Australian College of Advanced Education, WESTERN AUSTRALIA (WACAE)	Associate Diploma in Community Language Studies	Portuguese Vietnamese
	Graduate Diploma in Translating/Interpreting	German
Western Australian Institute of Technology, WESTERN AUSTRALIA (WAIT)	BA (Asian Studies)	Indonesian

Abbreviations for the institutions will be used hereafter.

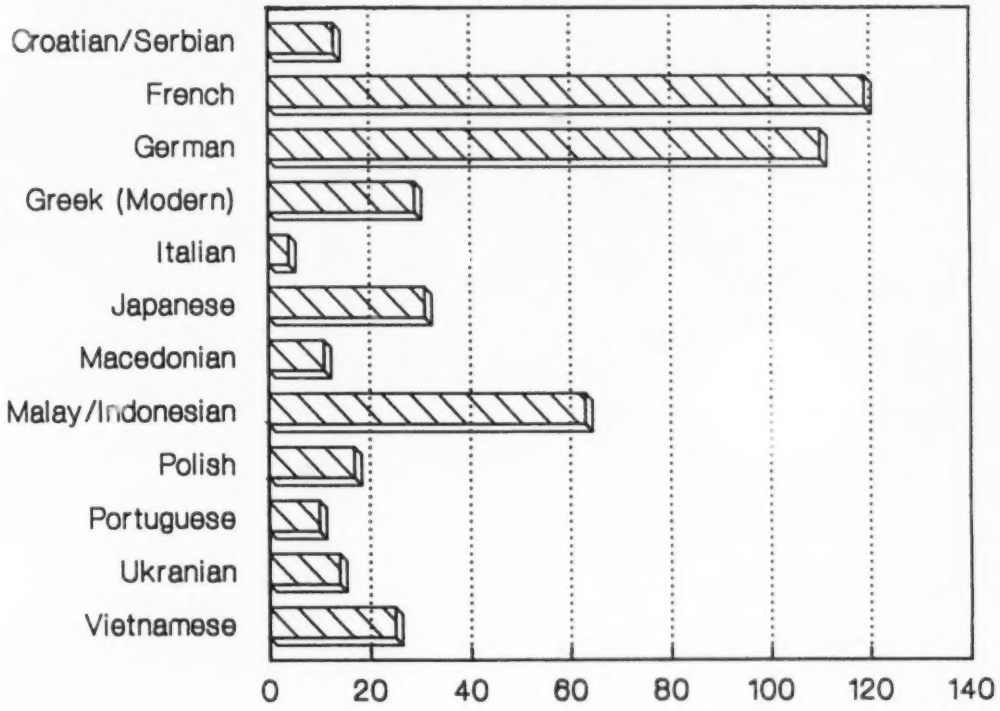
In September, 1985, with the assistance of the institutions concerned, questionnaires were sent to 868 students enrolled in all-language or predominantly language subjects. Subjects treating literature, cultural background or skills such as interpreting were not included for the purposes of the survey. The questionnaire sought responses under the headings - General Information, Personal Information, Course Information, Seminars/Tutorials, Library Facilities, Study Centre, Assignments, Method of Assessment, Teaching, Objectives and Assessment of Courses and Comments.

Of the 868 students surveyed, 358 replied, a response rate of just over 41%. No systematic follow-up was attempted to obtain more responses as it was late in the year and students were occupied with examinations and final assignments.

Table 2 shows the number of responses for each language.

TABLE 2

Responses by Language



3 Survey Analysis

The questionnaire responses were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSSX) on the School's VAX mini-computer. Frequency counts of all variables and cross-tabulations of all variables by institution were carried out. Some recoding of variables and cross-tabulation of these recodings were done to facilitate analysis of the information obtained and for clarity of presentation. For example, students were given the option of responding, where relevant, for up to four subjects; where appropriate these responses have been amalgamated. As the analysis is based on aggregation of multiple responses across several items the totals usually will not add up to 100.

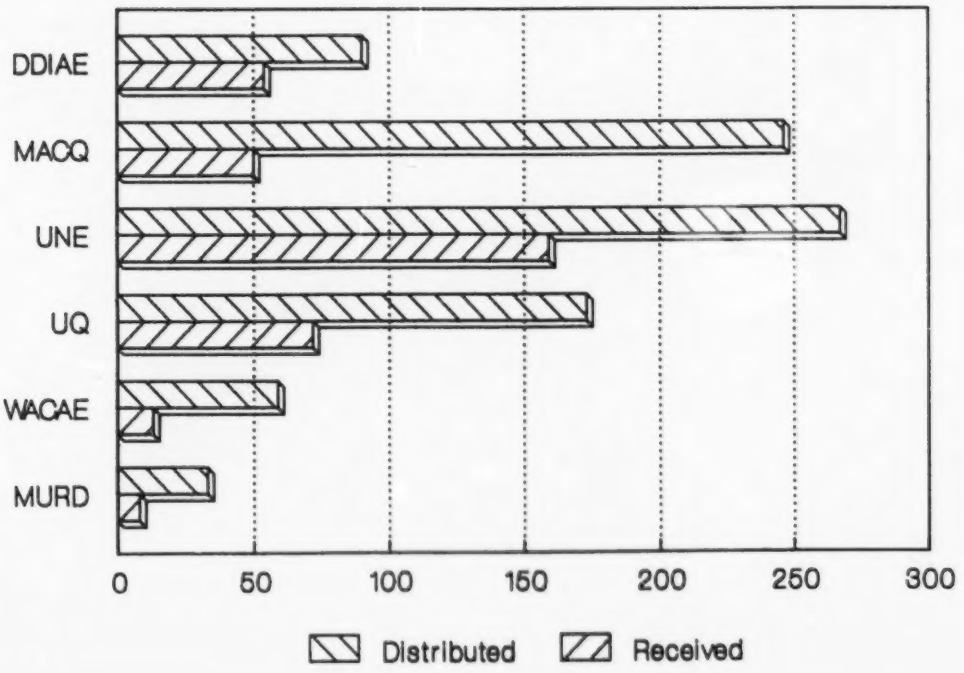
4 Survey Results

4.1 Profile of Institutions

Table 3 shows the distribution of responses by institution.

TABLE 3

Responses by Institution



Total 868; responses 358

Table 4 shows subject groups by institution.

TABLE 4

Subject Groups by Institution

Count Row % Col % Tab %	DDIAE	MACQ	UNE	UQ	WACAE	MURDOCH	MORE THAN ONE INSTIT	ROW TOTAL
CROATIAN	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	9
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5
	0.0	18.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
FRENCH	0	0	102	17	0	0	2	121
	0.0	0.0	84.3	14.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	33.8
	0.0	0.0	64.2	23.6	0.0	0.0	100.0	
	0.0	0.0	28.5	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.6	
GERMAN	0	0	70	41	0	0	1	112
	0.0	0.0	62.5	36.6	0.0	0.0	0.9	31.3
	0.0	0.0	44.0	56.9	0.0	0.0	50.0	
	0.0	0.0	19.6	11.5	0.0	0.0	0.3	
GREEK	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.8
	0.0	0.0	17.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	0.0	7.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
INDONESIAN	55	0	0	0	0	0	0	55
	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.4
	101.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	15.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
ITALIAN	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4
	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
JAPANESE	0	0	0	31	0	0	0	31
	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.7
	0.0	0.0	0.0	43.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	
MACEDONIAN	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	11
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.1
	0.0	22.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
MALAY/ INDONESIAN	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	2.2
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	
POLISH	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	17
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7
	0.0	34.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
PORTUGUESE	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	10
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	2.8
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	76.9	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.0	
SERBIAN	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
	0.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
UKRAINIAN	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	14
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.9
	0.0	28.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
VIETNAMESE	0	0	0	0	28	0	0	28
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	7.8
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	215.4	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.8	0.0	0.0	
Column TOTAL	54 15.1	50 14.0	159 44.4	72 20.1	13 3.6	8 2.2	2 0.6	358 100.0

Table 5 shows the degrees or diplomas by subjects and the number of responses received for each.

TABLE 5

Degrees or Diplomas by Subject

COUNT Row % Col % Tab %	BA	ASSOC DIP COMMUN STUD	NON-DEGREE COURSE	ASSOC DIP ASIAN STUD	NO COURSE	OTHER	Row TOTAL
CROATIAN	0	0	5	0	1	1	7
	0.0	0.0	71.4	0.0	14.3	14.3	2.0
	0.0	0.0	9.3	0.0	14.3	6.3	
	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.3	0.3	
FRENCH	106	0	8	0	2	5	121
	87.6	0.0	6.6	0.0	1.7	4.1	34.4
	50.5	0.0	14.8	0.0	28.6	31.3	
	30.1	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.6	1.4	
GERMAN	93	0	11	1	0	7	112
	83.0	0.0	9.8	0.9	0.0	6.3	31.8
	44.3	0.0	20.4	2.0	0.0	43.8	
	26.4	0.0	3.1	0.3	0.0	2.0	
GREEK	18	0	8	0	1	1	28
	64.3	0.0	28.6	0.0	3.6	3.6	8.0
	8.6	0.0	14.8	0.0	14.3	6.3	
	5.1	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.3	0.3	
INDONESIAN	1	3	0	49	0	2	55
	1.8	5.5	0.0	89.1	0.0	3.6	15.6
	0.5	20.0	0.0	98.0	0.0	12.5	
	0.3	0.9	0.0	12.9	0.0	0.6	
ITALIAN	3	0	0	0	1	0	4
	75.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	1.1
	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	0.0	
	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	
JAPANESE	26	0	5	0	0	0	31
	83.9	0.0	16.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.8
	12.4	0.0	9.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	7.4	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	
MACEDONIAN	2	0	9	0	0	0	11
	18.2	0.0	81.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.1
	1.0	0.0	16.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.6	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	
MALAY/ INDONESIAN	5	0	1	0	1	1	8
	62.5	0.0	12.5	0.0	12.5	12.5	2.3
	2.4	0.0	1.9	0.0	14.3	6.3	
	1.4	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.3	
POLISH	6	0	9	0	1	1	17
	35.3	0.0	52.9	0.0	5.9	5.9	4.8
	2.9	0.0	16.7	0.0	14.3	6.3	
	1.7	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.3	0.3	
PORTUGUESE	0	7	0	0	0	0	7
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
	0.0	46.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
SERBIAN	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	33.3	33.3	0.9
	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	14.3	6.3	
	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.3	
UKRAINIAN	4	0	8	0	0	0	12
	33.3	0.0	66.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4
	1.9	0.0	14.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	1.1	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	
VIETNAMESE	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.0
	0.0	186.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Column TOTAL	210	15	54	50	7	16	352
	59.7	4.3	15.3	14.2	2.0	4.5	100.0

4.2 Student Profiles

4.2.1 Enrolment Status

The vast majority of students (9?%) were enrolled with part-time status.

4.2.2 Nationality

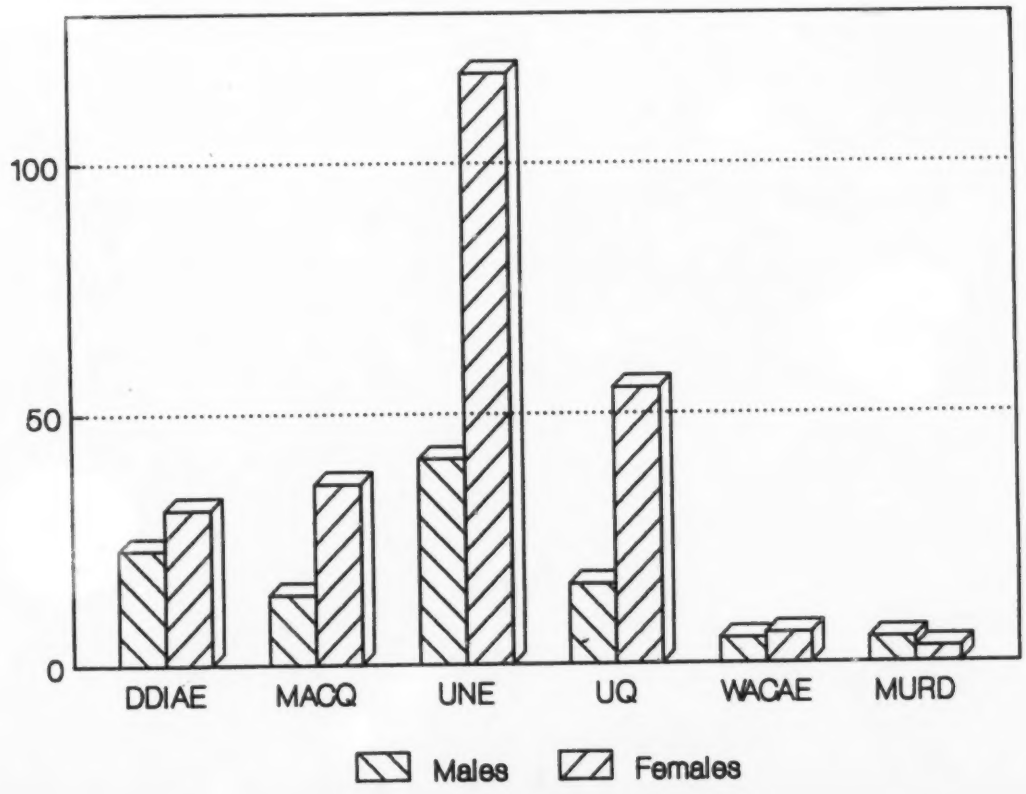
Australia was the country of birth of 67% of the respondents and of 55% of their fathers and 57% of their mothers.

4.2.3 Sex

Seventy-one per cent (71%) of the respondents were female and 29% male. The breakdown of sex by institution is shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Sex of Respondents by Institution



A breakdown of sex by language is shown in Table 6a.

TABLE 6a

Sex by Language

COUNT ROW % COL % TAB %	SEX MALE	 FEMALE	ROW TOTAL
CROATIAN	1 11.1 0.7 0.2	8 88.9 2.6 1.8	9 2.0
FRENCH	24 19.8 16.8 5.4	97 80.2 32.1 21.8	121 27.2
GERMAN	33 29.7 23.1 7.4	78 70.3 25.8 17.5	111 24.9
GREEK	13 46.4 9.1 2.9	15 53.6 5.0 3.4	28 6.3
INDONESIAN	24 43.6 16.8 5.4	31 56.4 10.3 7.0	55 12.4
ITALIAN	2 50.0 1.4 0.4	2 50.0 0.7 0.4	4 0.9
JAPANESE	11 35.5 7.7 2.5	20 64.5 6.6 4.5	31 7.0
MACEDONIAN	6 54.5 4.2 1.3	5 45.5 1.7 1.1	11 2.5
MALAY/ INDONESIAN	5 62.5 3.5 1.1	3 37.5 1.0 0.7	8 1.8
POLISH	2 11.8 1.4 0.4	15 88.2 5.0 3.4	17 3.8
PORTUGESE	4 57.1 2.8 0.9	3 42.9 1.0 0.7	7 1.6
SERBIAN	2 50.0 1.4 0.4	2 50.0 0.7 0.4	4 0.9
UKRANIAN	5 35.7 3.5 1.1	9 64.3 3.0 2.0	14 3.1
VIETNAMESE	11 44.0 7.7 2.5	14 56.0 4.6 3.1	25 5.6
Column TOTAL	143 32.1	302 67.9	445 100.0

4.2.4 Age

The largest age group was 35-39 (18%), followed by the 25-29 group (15%), the 30-34 group (14%) and the 40-44 group (12%). There were relatively small numbers in the age groupings under 25 and over 65, but students from 45 to 65 totalled 27%. Five per cent (5%) were over 65. Age groups cross-tabulated with the institutions are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Age Groups by Institution

COUNT ROW %	DDIAE	MACQ	UNE	UQ	WACAE	MURD	MORE THAN ONE	ROW TOTAL
Under 25	6 18.2	11 33.3	4 12.1	9 27.3		7 6.1	1 3.0	33 9.2
25-29	3 5.8	8 15.4	28 53.8	11 21.2	2 3.8			52 14.6
30-34	4 8.2	7 14.3	18 36.7	18 36.7	1 2.0	1 2.0		49 13.7
35-39	7 10.8	9 13.8	33 50.8	12 18.5	3 4.6	1 1.5		65 18.2
40-44	9 20.9	5 11.6	21 48.8	6 14.0		1 2.3	1 2.3	43 12.0
45-54	10 17.2	4 6.9	25 43.1	13 22.4	5 8.6	1 1.7		58 16.2
Over 55	15 26.3	6 10.5	30 52.6	3 5.3	1 1.8	2 3.5		57 16.0
Column TOTAL	54 15.1	50 14.0	159 44.5	72 20.2	12 3.4	8 2.2	2 0.6	357 100.0

Age groups cross-tabulated by language are shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Age Groups by Language

COUNT ROW % COL % TAB %	UNDER 25	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-54	OVER 55	ROW TOTAL
CROATIAN	2	5	0	2	0	0	0	9
	22.2	55.6	0.0	22.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
	5.1	7.8	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.4	1.1	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	
FRENCH	5	15	18	20	19	24	20	121
	4.1	12.4	14.9	16.5	15.7	19.8	16.5	26.9
	12.8	23.4	28.6	23.0	38.8	31.6	28.2	
	1.1	3.3	4.0	4.5	4.2	5.3	4.5	
GERMAN	8	19	12	27	14	15	17	112
	7.1	17.0	10.7	24.1	12.5	13.4	15.2	24.9
	20.5	29.7	19.0	31.0	28.6	19.7	23.9	
	1.8	4.2	2.7	6.0	3.1	3.3	3.8	
GREEK	1	4	6	7	0	4	6	28
	3.6	14.3	21.4	25.0	0.0	14.3	21.4	6.2
	2.6	6.3	9.5	8.0	0.0	5.3	8.5	
	0.2	0.9	1.3	1.6	0.0	0.9	1.3	
INDONESIAN	6	3	5	7	9	10	15	55
	10.9	5.5	9.1	12.7	16.4	18.2	27.3	12.2
	15.4	4.7	7.9	8.0	18.4	13.2	21.1	
	1.3	0.7	1.1	1.6	2.0	2.2	3.3	
ITALIAN	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	4
	0.0	50.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.9
	0.0	3.1	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	1.4	
	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	
JAPANESE	5	6	10	7	0	3	0	31
	16.1	19.4	32.3	22.6	0.0	9.7	0.0	6.9
	12.8	9.4	15.9	8.0	0.0	3.9	0.0	
	1.1	1.3	2.2	1.6	0.0	0.7	0.0	
MACEDONIAN	5	1	1	3	1	0	0	11
	45.5	9.1	9.1	27.3	9.1	0.0	0.0	2.4
	12.8	1.6	1.6	3.4	2.0	0.0	0.0	
	1.1	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	
MALAY/ INDONESIAN	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	8
	25.0	0.0	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	25.0	1.8
	5.1	0.0	1.6	1.1	2.0	1.3	2.8	
	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	
POLISH	3	1	4	2	0	3	4	17
	17.6	5.9	23.5	11.	0.0	17.6	23.5	3.8
	7.7	1.6	6.3	2.3	0.0	3.9	5.6	
	0.7	0.2	0.9	0.4	0.0	0.7	0.9	
PORTUGUESE	0	6	0	3	0	1	0	10
	0.0	60.0	0.0	30.0	0.0	10.0	0.0	2.2
	0.0	9.4	0.0	3.4	0.0	1.3	0.0	
	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.0	
SERBIAN	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
	0.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.9
	0.0	1.6	1.6	1.1	2.0	0.0	0.0	
	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.02	0.2	0.0	0.0	
UKRANIAN	2	1	1	2	4	2	2	14
	14.3	7.1	7.1	14.3	28.6	14.3	14.3	3.1
	5.1	1.6	1.6	2.3	8.2	2.6	2.8	
	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.9	0.4	0.4	
VIETNAMESE	0	0	4	4	0	13	4	25
	0.0	0.0	16.0	16.0	0.0	52.0	16.0	5.6
	0.0	0.0	6.3	4.6	0.0	17.1	5.6	
	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.9	0.0	2.9	0.9	
COLUMN TOTAL	39 8.7	64 14.3	63 14.0	87 19.4	49 10.9	76 16.9	71 15.8	449 100.0

Age groups cross-tabulated by sex are shown in Table 8a.

TABLE 8a

Age Groups by Sex

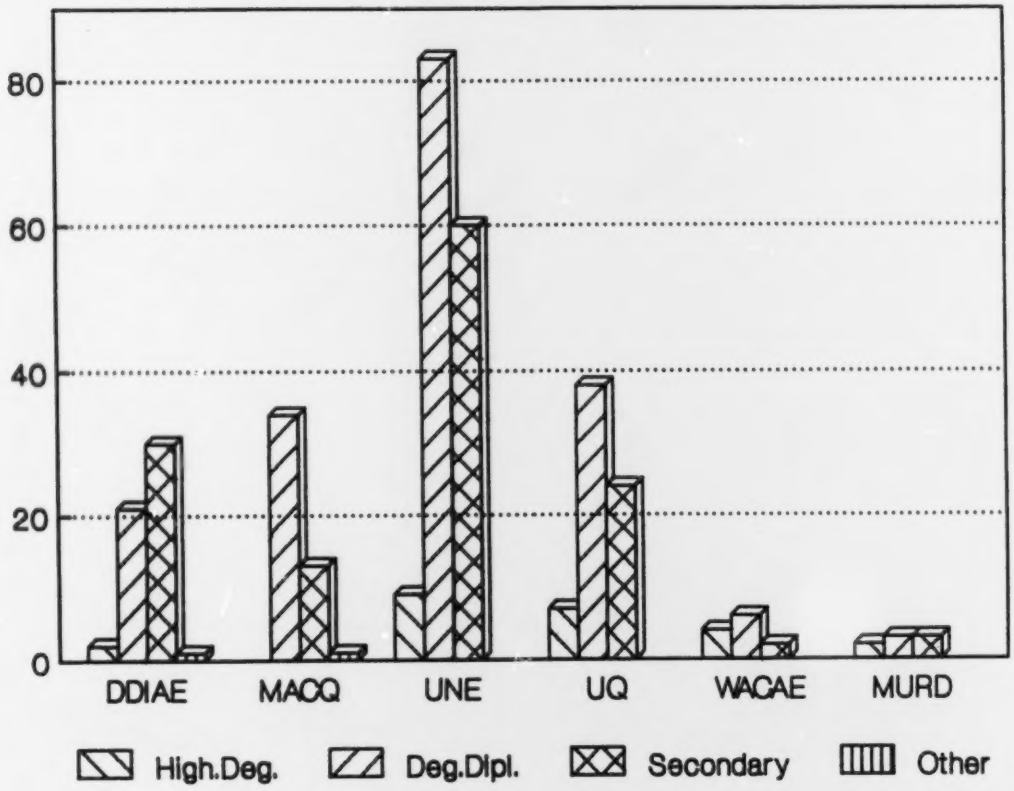
COUNT ROW %	SEX MALE	 FEMALE	ROW TOTAL
UNDER 25	10 30.3	23 69.7	33 9.3
25-29	12 23.1	40 76.9	52 14.6
30-34	12 24.5	37 75.5	49 13.8
35-39	19 29.7	45 70.3	64 18.0
40-44	13 30.2	30 69.8	43 12.1
45-54	20 35.1	37 64.9	57 16.1
OVER 55	18 31.6	39 68.4	57 16.1
COLUMN TOTAL	104 29.3	251 70.7	355 100.0

4.2.5 Previous Highest Qualifications

The previous highest qualifications of the respondents is shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9

Previous Highest Qualification Obtained



4.2.6 Occupation

Table 10 shows students' occupations.

TABLE 10

Occupation of Students

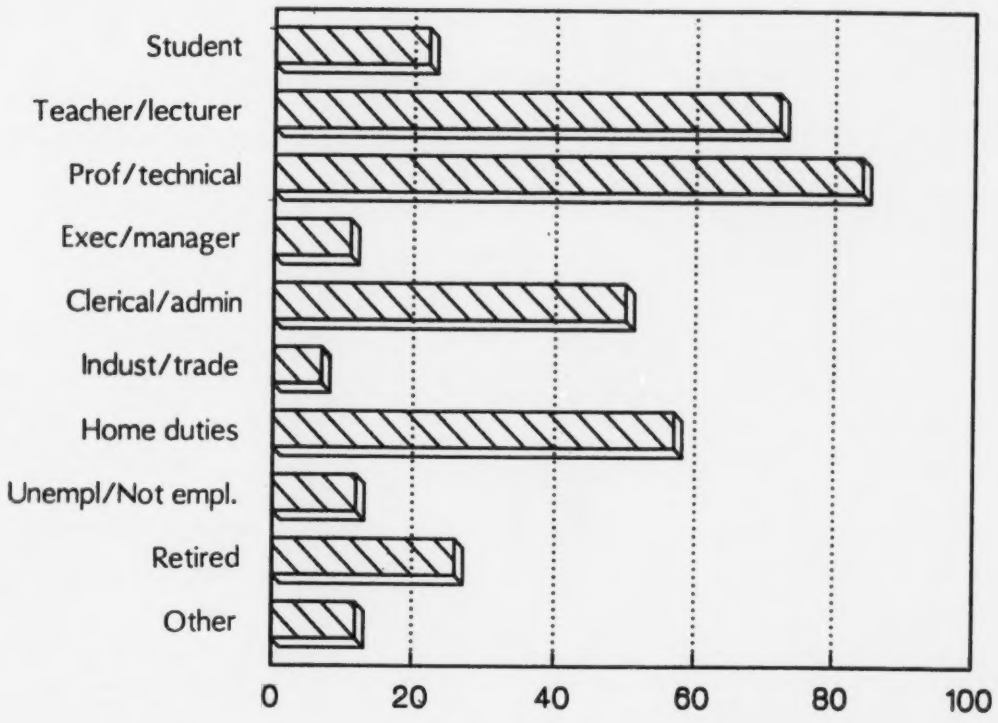


Table 11 gives the breakdown of occupations by institution.

TABLE 11

Occupation of Students by Institution

INSTITUTION	STUDENT	TEACHER/ LECTURER	PROF/ TECHNICAL	EXEC/ MANAGER	CLERICAL/ ADMIN	INDUST/ TRADE	HOME DUTIES	UNEMPL/ NO EMPLOY	RETIRED	OTHER	TOTAL
DDIAE	2 3.7	4 7.4	18 33.3	3 5.6	5 9.3	2 3.7	11 20.4	2 3.7	7 13.0		54 15.2
MACQUARIE	10 20.0	7 14.0	11 22.0	2 4.0	8 16.0	1 2.0	4 8.0	2 4.0	4 8.0	1 2.0	50 15.0
UNE	3 1.9	41 25.8	29 18.2	5 3.1	25 15.7	2 1.3	24 15.1	6 3.8	11 6.9	10 6.3	159 44.7
UQ	5 7.0	16 22.5	18 25.4	1 1.4	11 15.5	1 1.4	14 19.7	1 1.4	4 5.6		71 19.9
WACAE		3 25.0	5 41.7		1 8.3		2 16.7			1 8.3	12 3.4
MURDOCH	1 12.5	1 12.5	3 37.5			1 12.5	1 12.5	1 12.5			8 2.2
MORE THAN ONE INSTITUTION	1 50.0						1 50.0				2 0.6
TOTAL	22 6.2	72 20.2	84 23.6	11 3.1	50 14.0	7 2.0	57 16.0	12 3.4	26 7.3	12 3.4	356 100.0

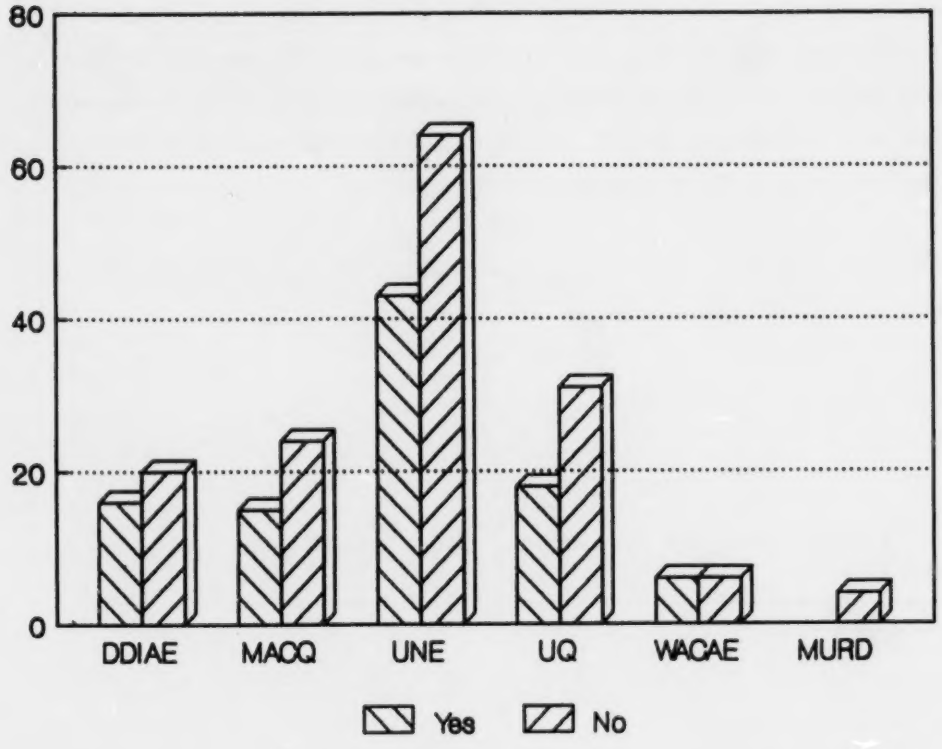
As might be expected, the professional groups made up the majority. Another group, which in the common perception constitutes a high proportion of the external student body, those engaged in home duties, were represented by a relatively low 16%.

4.2.7 Previous Enrolment

Students were asked whether they had previously been enrolled, either externally or internally, in a tertiary institution. The majority (62.8%) said that they had, while 37.2% had not. Of those who had been enrolled before, 72.5% had been enrolled internally, 16.7% externally and 10.8% had been enrolled in both modes. Most (82.6%) had been enrolled in Australian institutions. Table 12 shows how many students, by institution, had previously undertaken language study at tertiary level.

TABLE 12

Previous Tertiary Language Study



4.2.8 Reasons for Enrolling Externally

Students were asked their reasons for enrolling as external students and multiple responses were permitted. Fifty-five per cent (55%) of the responses indicated that students had enrolled externally because of the distance of their home from the institution (50% of all respondents lived over 500 km away), 74% because timetabling made attendance on campus inconvenient and 38% because of a preference for studying externally. A total of 66% of students said they would have preferred to be enrolled as an internal student, either full-time or part-time, for part of their total course, while 34% had no wish to be enrolled internally for any part of their course.

Other reasons given by students for enrolling externally included work or family commitments, preferring to work to their own schedules, the course not being offered at their own institution, or their lifestyle involved frequent moves or travelling. Some mature-age students disliked mixing with younger students and others indicated that they were uncomfortable in a classroom situation. It was not possible to ascertain from the responses to what extent students had enrolled in a language subject externally by deliberate choice.

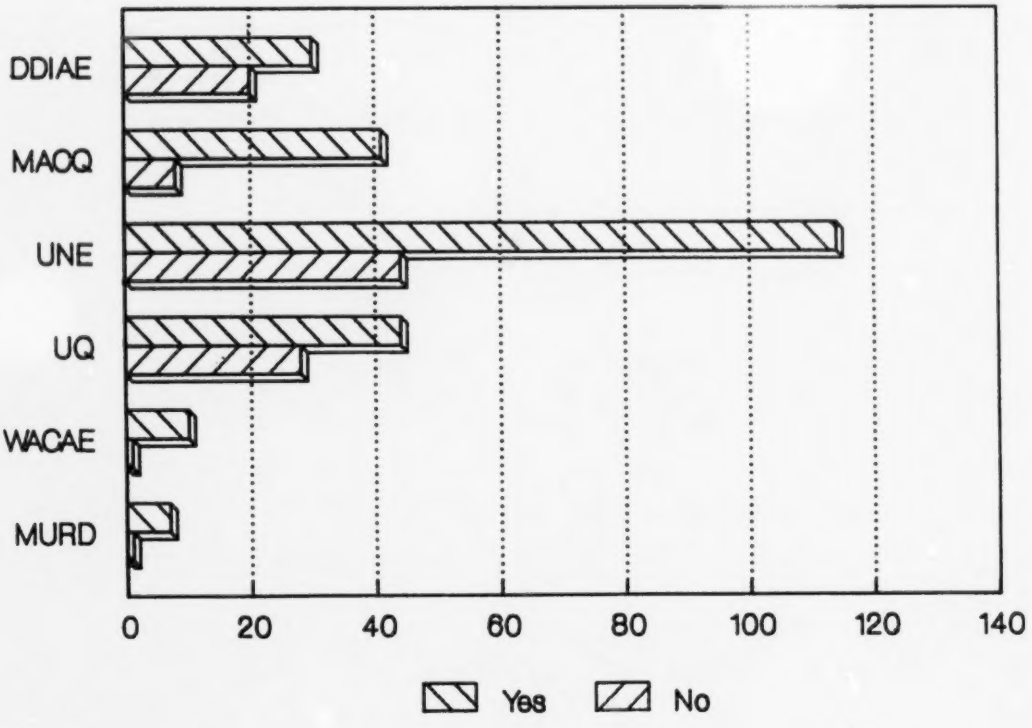
4.2.9 Previous Exposure to Languages

Students were asked if they had grown up in an environment where they heard or spoke a language, or languages, other than English. Thirty-three per cent (33%) answered that they had and 67% that they had not. By far the largest number of those giving an affirmative response had had exposure to a European language (52%) and only 5% cited an Asian language. Three per cent (3%) had been exposed to both European and Asian Languages.

Over seventy per cent (70.9%) of respondents had proficiency in a language other than English prior to enrolment in their present course, as Table 13 shows.

TABLE 13

Prior Proficiency in a Language Other than English

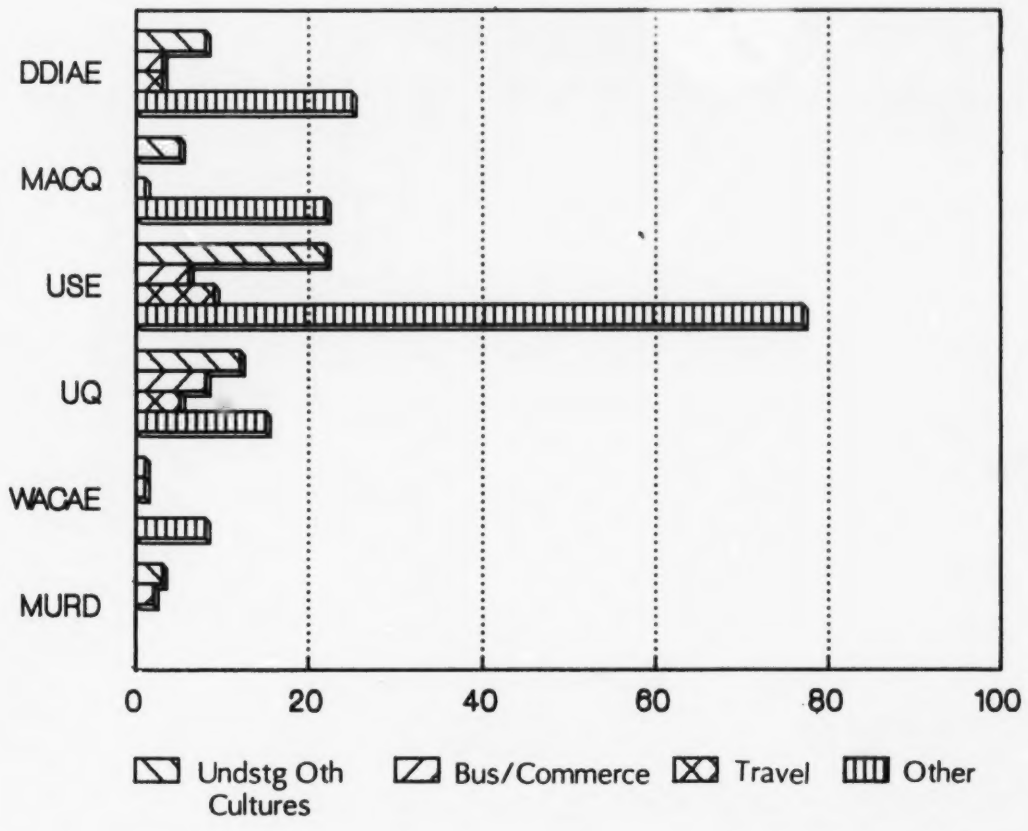


Again, the vast majority of these had proficiency in a European language (88%) and 7% of respondents had proficiency in an Asian language. Distribution on a self-assessment scale of low, average or high competence levels in the four skills areas of reading, writing, speaking and understanding the spoken language was reasonably even.

As might be expected of students enrolled in one or more language subjects, nearly all of them (98%) considered the acquisition of a language other than English desirable. As to which language or languages, 38% nominated a European language and 21% an Asian language. Twenty per cent (20%) said that the particular language was unimportant and 20% thought that it was desirable to acquire more than one other language. Reasons given for the importance of acquiring another language or languages are set out in Table 14.

TABLE 14

Reasons for Acquiring Another Language



Students were asked whether their previous experience with language learning, if any, had influenced them to undertake their present course of study. For those who had been favourably influenced by their previous experience (59%), more general reasons included the enjoyment derived from language learning, understanding other cultures, desire to maintain or upgrade language skills or the feeling that familiarity with language learning would make the present course easier, especially as it was to be studied at a distance. Specific purposes for learning a language were sometimes a motivating force and included marriage, family background, travel or the need to communicate with a particular cultural group.

Those who said that their previous experience had not influenced them to undertake their present course cited disastrous experiences of language learning in institutions which had deterred them from attempting again for many years.

The largest response to why students had chosen particular language subjects was personal satisfaction (27%), followed by interest in other cultures (22%), general interest (18%), travel (14%) and professional reasons (13%). Table 15 gives the number of responses by language.

TABLE 15

Reasons for Choosing to Study a Particular Language

	TRAVEL	PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES	GENERAL INTEREST	INTEREST OTHER CULTURES	PERSONAL SATISFACTION
CROATIAN	1	4	2	3	8
FRENCH	41	39	61	63	92
GERMAN	39	34	60	52	75
GREEK	3	5	7	10	17
INDONESIAN	18	11	20	38	26
ITALIAN	2	1	1	2	3
JAPANESE	22	13	18	24	16
MACEDONIAN	5	8	6	6	8
MALAY/ INDONESIAN	5	1	2	7	2
POLISH	1	4	5	1	9
PORTUGUESE	3	4	-	3	3
SERBIAN	2	4	1	3	2
UKRAINIAN	-	5	4	5	13
VIETNAMESE	4	15	10	18	13
TOTAL	146	148	197	235	287

4.3 Course Materials

Students were asked which course materials they had received. Table 16 shows the number of responses per course component.

TABLE 16

Course Materials Received

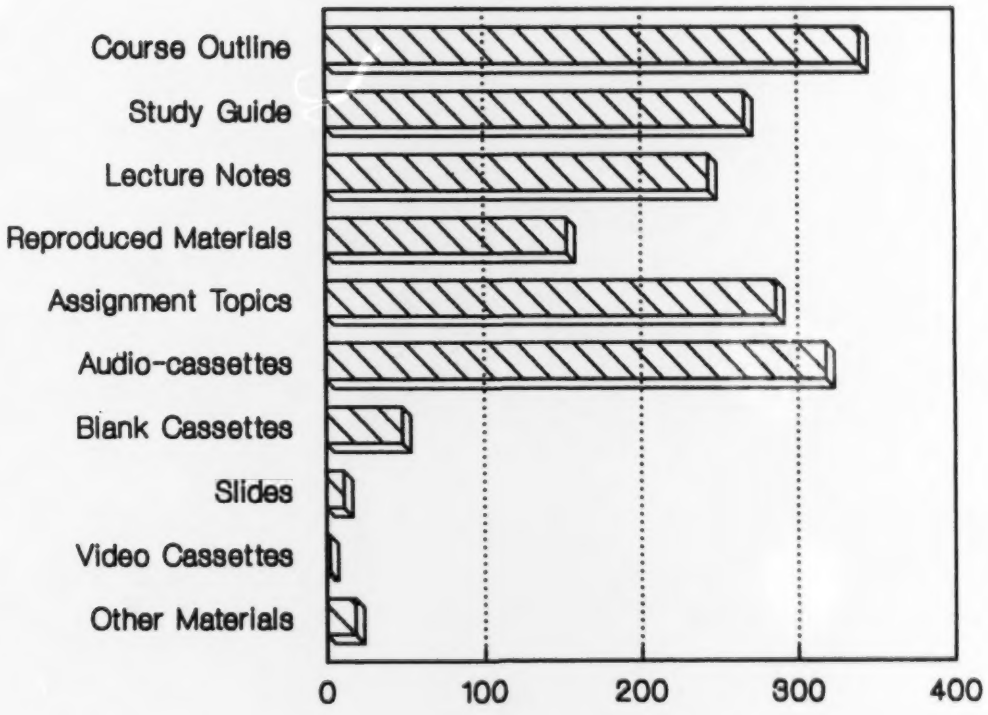
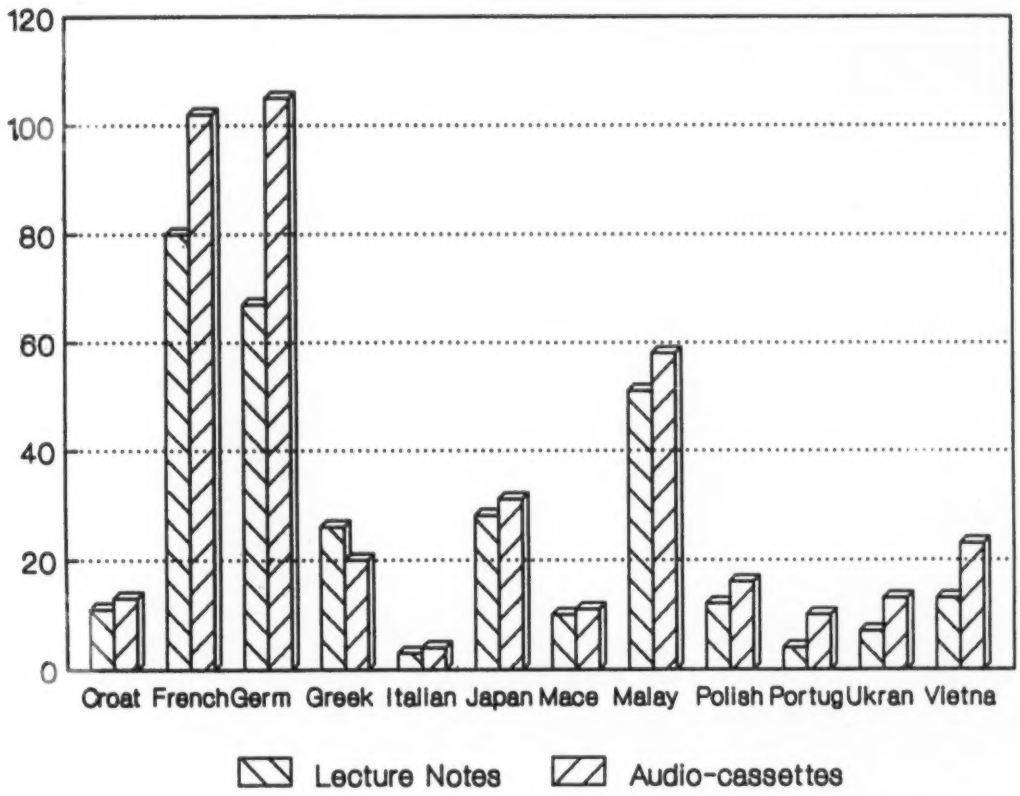


Table 17 sets out the responses for lecture notes and audio-cassettes, still generally the major components of language courses taught at a distance, by language.

TABLE 17

Lecture Notes and Audio-Cassettes



Additional materials and information received by students were described as including details of language magazines and broadcasts, addresses of other students, music on tape, model answers, additional books or manuals, sample examination papers and vocabulary lists.

The majority (76%) said that course materials had arrived on time and at regular intervals, 20% said that they had as a general rule and 4% said that they had not.

4.4 Facilities and Support Services

Table 18 shows the number of responses regarding the facilities and support services available to students.

TABLE 18

Facilities and Support Services Available

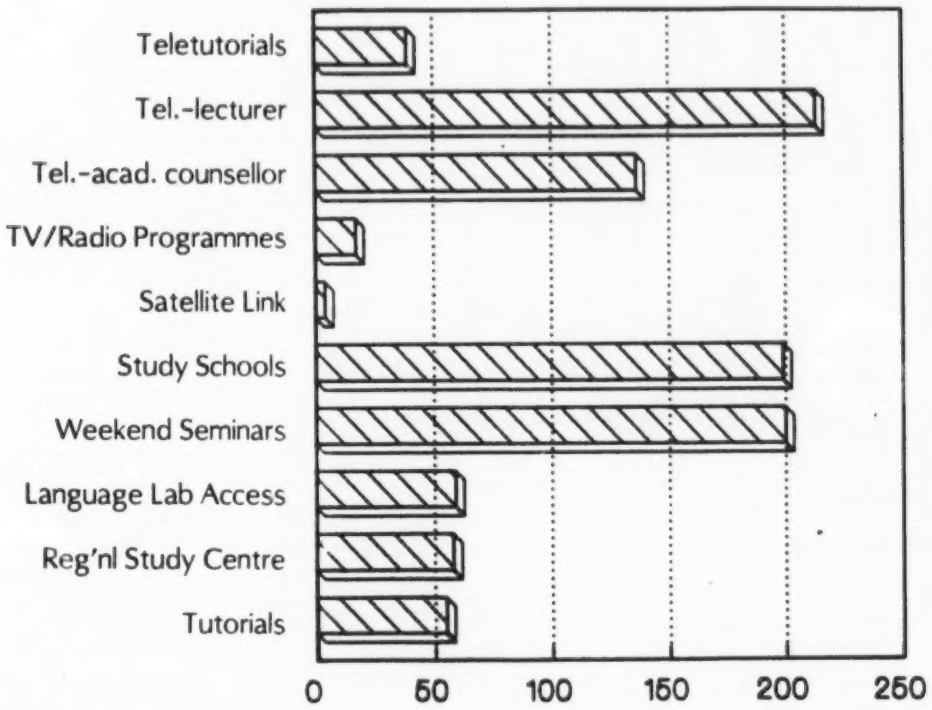
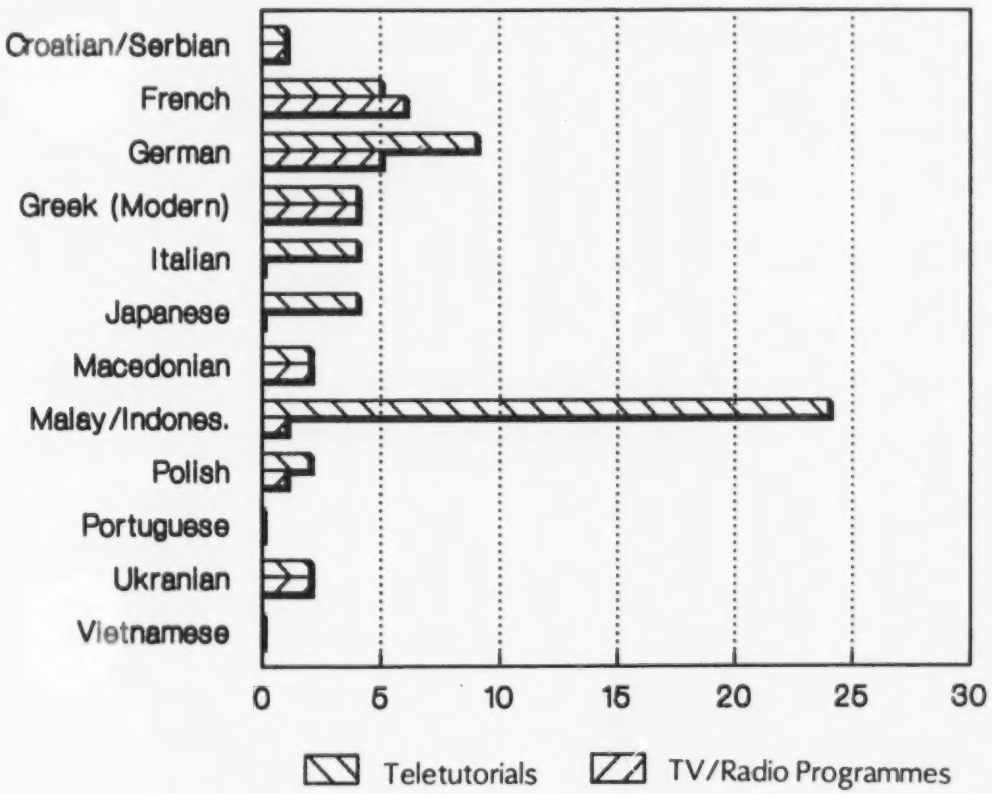


Table 19 shows the responses by language with regard to the availability of teletutorials and television and radio programmes.

TABLE 19

Teletutorials and TV/Radio Programmes



4.4.1 Seminars and Tutorials

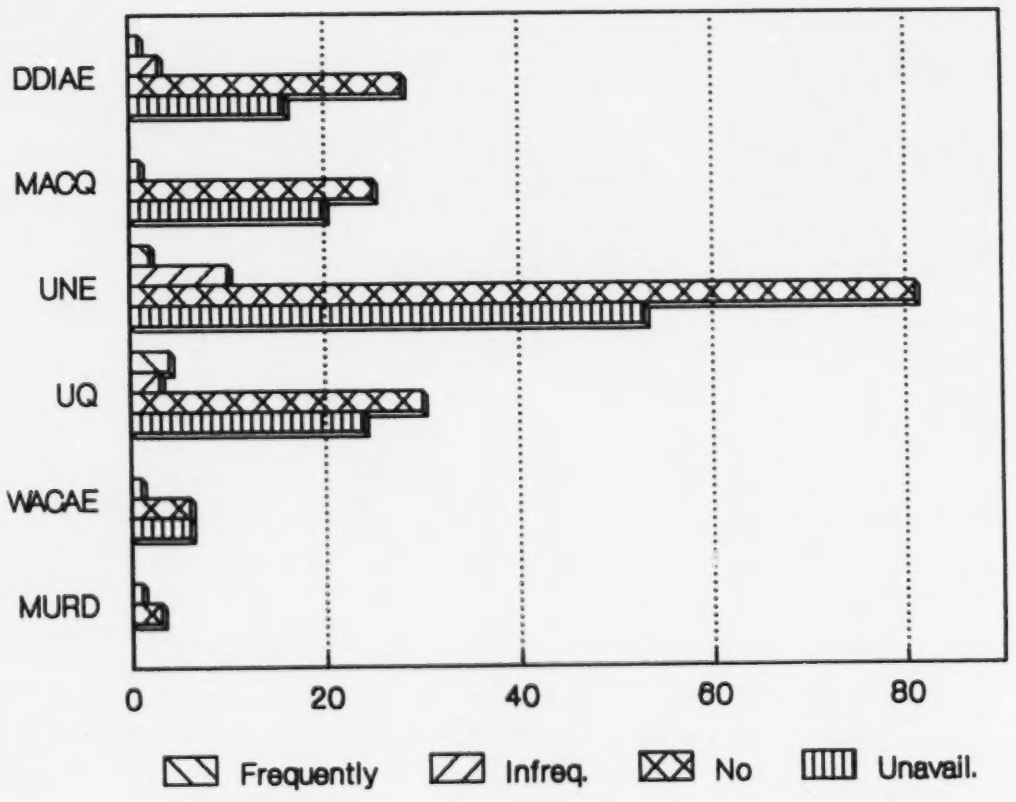
Fifty-five per cent (55%) of students reported that there were compulsory seminars or tutorials held on their institution's campus. UQ, WACAE and Murdoch appeared to have no compulsory attendance, while UNE seemed to require attendance for all subjects. Responses indicated that DDIAE and Macquarie required attendance for some subjects but not others. The periods of attendance given ranged from one to sixteen days.

Over eight per cent (8.8%) of respondents said that they obtained tutorial assistance through a regional study centre and 54.1% said that they did not. A further 37% said that such facilities were not available to them. The responses by institution are set out in Table 20.

Of those who obtained tutorial assistance, 86% found it useful.

TABLE 20

Regional Tutorials Attendance

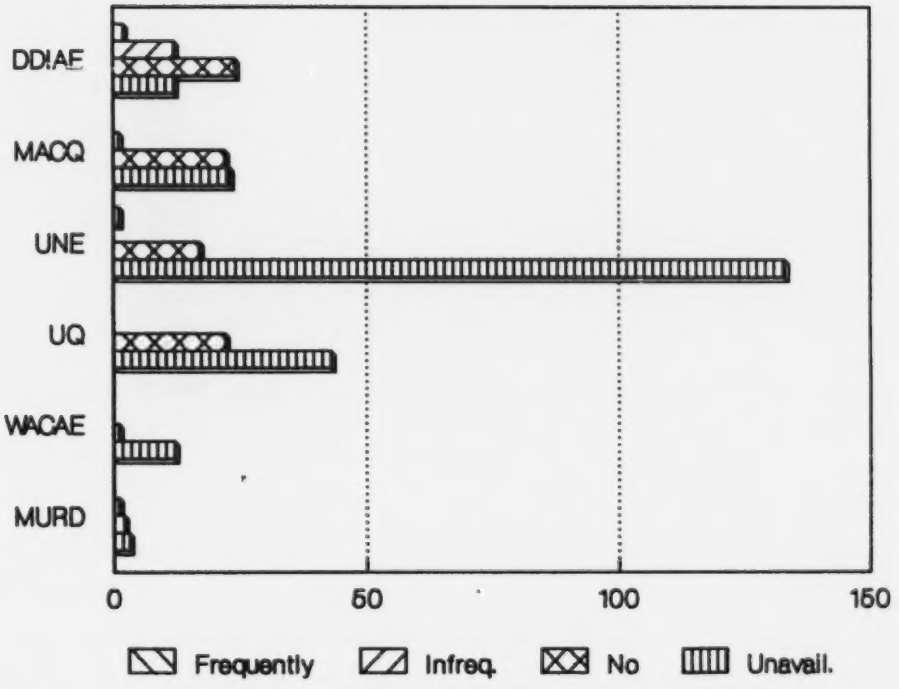


4.4.2 Teletutorials

Only about 5% of respondents had participated in telephone tutorials, 26.4% replied that they had not and over 68% that they were not available to them. Table 21 sets out the responses by institution.

TABLE 21

Teletutorial Participation



Only one institution (DDIAE) appeared to use teletutorials consistently as an integral part of the course. The questionnaire did not require a distinction to be made between an individual student/teacher contact and a group tutorial link-up.

Those students who had participated in teletutorials remarked that they were helpful for pronunciation, they were excellent but not frequent enough and their main benefit was psychological, giving a voice and identity to the lecturer and fellow students. Some felt intimidated attempting to communicate with a group by telephone when they had little proficiency and thought that teletutorials were therefore more useful when one had acquired a higher level of oral competence. One institution (DDIAE) sent recordings of the teletutorials to students who could not participate.

Overall, the impression seemed to be very favourable and there was keen interest on the part of those who had not participated previously to know more about teletutorials and to experience them.

4.4.3 Study Centres

Students were asked if they had used a regional study centre if they lived too far away to use the facilities of their institution. Sixty-nine per cent (69%) said that they had not and of these 40% said that this was because it was too far from their place of residence. Of those who did use study centres, 27% used them for their library facilities and 52% used them for a number of purposes, including library, private study, tutorials, social meetings with other students and obtaining course information.

4.4.4 Teacher Contact

Most students (60%) indicated that their lecturer was a native speaker of the language being taught and 56% said that their tutor (if any) was a native speaker. Seventy-six per cent (76%) of respondents said that their lecturer could be contacted as often as required. Fifty per cent (50%) said that they had contacted teaching staff between one and five times during their course, but only a small number had made contact more than five times. Thirty-eight per cent (38%) said that they had had no contact.

4.4.5 Libraries

Students were evenly divided as to whether or not they used on-campus or study centre libraries. Fifty-three per cent (53%) of those who did use the library facilities borrowed between one and five books, 17% between one and five cassettes and 16% between one and five magazines. Most did not borrow at all, perhaps suggesting that materials provided by institutions were adequate and that supplementary library materials are not as necessary in language learning as in some other subjects.

4.5 Students' Evaluation of Courses

4.5.1 Workload

Ten hours of study per week per subject, on average, was the figure given by the largest single group (18%). When asked to assess the workload required for their subject, 6% of respondents felt that it was too low, 80% that it was about right and 14% that it was too high. Assessment of this kind would reflect such factors as aptitude, prior experience of language learning and personal

circumstances and this was borne out by the range of observations made. Students commented variously that it was more time-consuming to study externally, the pace was unrelenting, the workload was well spread, too much additional work had to be done (an example was preliminary vocabulary extension or translation where the course was written in the target language), the workload was too high or too low for the credit and level involved, certain components of the course dominated disproportionately and too little assistance was available when required.

4.5.2 Assignments

The majority of students (81%) said that they were set seven or more assignments for their language subjects, and this was consistent with the number of assignments individuals said they actually submitted. Almost all students said that topics were received in time to allow preparation, the topics were clear and the markers' comments were helpful. By the students' own assessment, assignments seemed to have a much higher written than oral or aural component.

4.5.3 Method of Assessment

The majority of students said that assessment of their performance was by a combination of examination and assignment. Ninety per cent (90%) of students were satisfied with the method of assessment used in their subject. Most of the comments on assessment were specific to individuals but one of the more frequent remarks was that oral skills were not adequately tested, if at all.

4.5.4 Evaluation of Subject Components

In evaluating the components of their subjects, 30% of students felt that there was too heavy a bias towards the written component, only 1% in each case felt that the bias was towards oral or aural components and 67% felt that the balance was right. However, a few individual comments highlighted the fact that the student's aim had been to improve the written rather than the spoken language, acknowledging that the acquisition of oral skills was difficult through the medium of distance teaching. Others had an expectation that they would learn to speak the language and were consequently disappointed.

4.5.5 Language Practice

Students were asked to explain how they had practised speaking the language they were learning. Multiple responses were permitted. Eleven per cent (11%) of responses indicated speaking with a lecturer, 12% with a tutor, 30% when recording tapes for assignment purposes, 14% with other

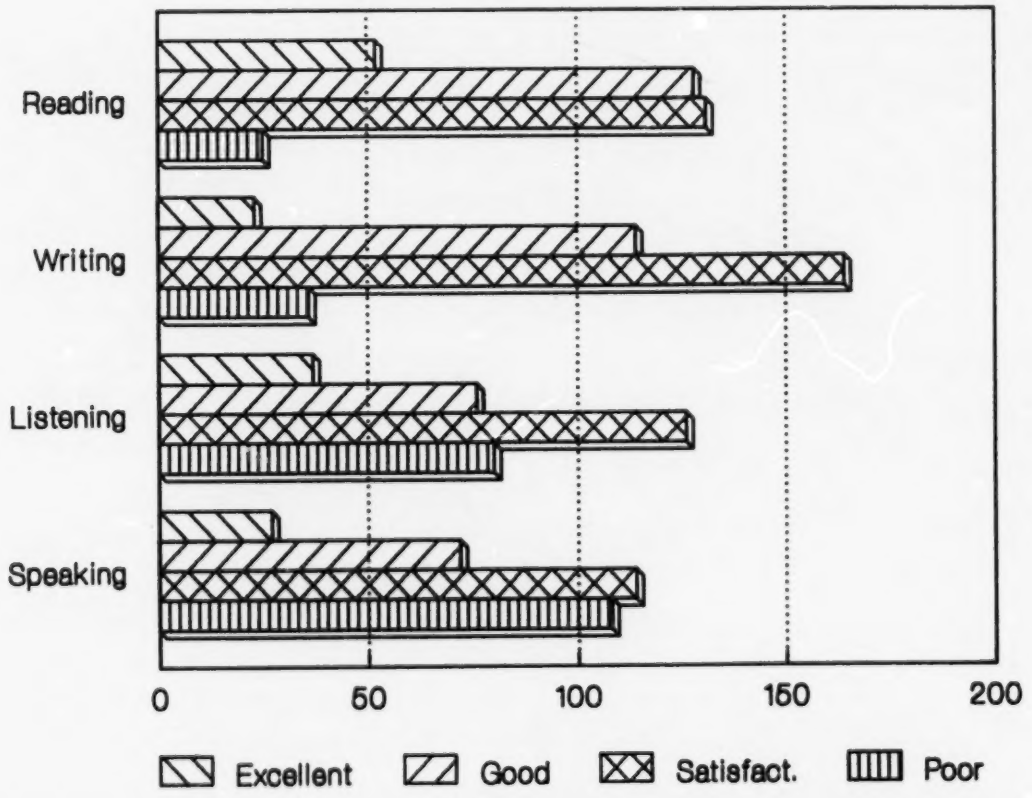
students and 29% with other people, who included spouses, relatives, neighbours, friends and other community contacts. Four per cent (4%) indicated that they had had no practice at all in speaking the target language. Poor quality tape recordings seemed to be adding to the students' problems in some cases. There were suggestions that elementary level tapes should be recorded at a slower pace with a gradual progression through to the higher levels.

4.6 Students' Assessment of their Achievement in Acquiring Language Skills

Students were asked which of the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) they had aimed to acquire when enrolling in a language subject. Multiple responses were permitted. Twenty-six per cent (26%) of responses nominated reading, 26% writing, 23% listening and 25% speaking. Thus students' expectations are to be able to read, write, understand and speak a language at the end of a course with little differentiation between these skills. There is only minimal indication from this survey that the majority enrol expecting that they will achieve significantly less in the area of speaking. However, the assessment of their own attainment at the end of the course shows a greater number of students putting themselves in the 'poor' category for speaking skills, as Table 22 indicates.

TABLE 22

End-of-Course Skills Evaluation



A majority of students expressed dissatisfaction with their achievement in some area. Thirteen per cent (13%) of responses indicated reading, 17% writing, 26% listening and 44% speaking.

This would seem to indicate a lack of specificity as to objectives of language courses on the part of institutions. Students were ready to acknowledge their shortcomings (as well as those of the institutions) where they had not met their own expectations, attributing their lack of achievement to the following factors:

TABLE 23

Factors Contributing to Lack of Achievement

	% of Total
Personal reasons	28
Course content unsatisfactory	13
Course presentation unsatisfactory	12
Lack of access to teaching staff	20
Inadequate library facilities	2
Own expectations too high	12
Institution's expectations too high	4
Lack of study skills	6
Inadequate counselling	3

The personal reasons for apparent lack of progress included a higher priority being given to another subject, lacking confidence or having no prior language learning experience, disliking the language and lack of time to devote to the work required.

4.7 Students' Appraisal of the Institutional Procedures

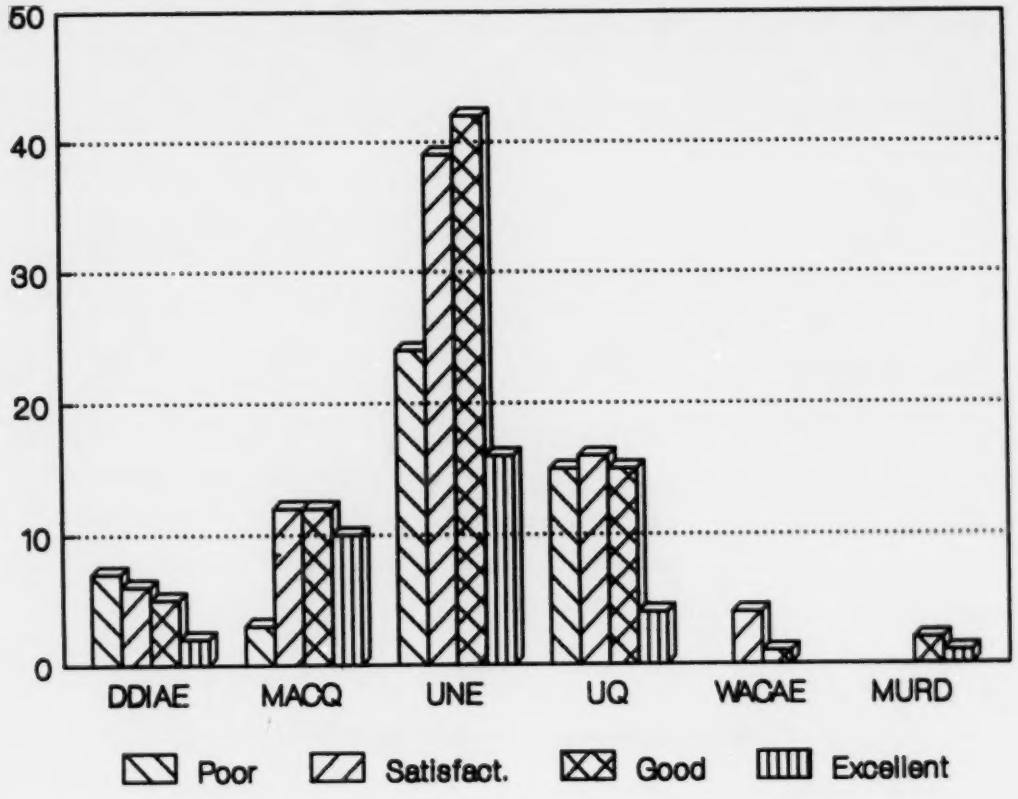
Students were asked if, where they saw scope for improvement in the practices and procedures of the institutions where language teaching was concerned, they could suggest ways of streamlining them. Comments were numerous and often constructive. A recurring theme was the need for immediate feedback from teaching staff. Late return of assignments was a major source of aggravation as was inability to contact staff when required.

Some students who lived a long way from their institution and had no regional centre requested reciprocal tutorial or library facilities with other institutions. There were also requests for more on-campus sessions and access to study centres and teletutorials and for courses to be updated and

to include more audio-visual teaching aids. Not all students were satisfied with the range of languages available at their institution, as Table 24 shows.

TABLE 24

Range of Languages Available



Many students praised their teachers for being understanding and helpful and remarked favourably on course presentation and despatch.

4.8 Students' Appraisal of Distance Language Learning

Students were asked if, overall, they had enjoyed their language learning experience. The overwhelming majority (93%) said that they had and 84% said that they would be continuing their language studies. Of those who said they would not continue, many cited personal reasons, that their course was finished, or that there were no further language options open to them. Many respondents felt that a major advantage of distance learning was being able to work to their own schedule and at their own pace. Table 25 shows responses by institution.

TABLE 25

Major Advantages of Distance Language Learning

COUNT ROW % INSTITUTION	WORK OWN SCHEDULE	WORK AT OWN PACE	SAVES TIME	AVAILABLE REMOTE STUDENTS	NONE	OTHER	MORE THAN ONE REASON	ROW TOTAL
DDIAE	12 24.5	3 6.1	1 2.0	8 16.3	5 10.5	9 18.4	11 22.4	49 14.9
MACQUARIE	14 30.4	5 10.9		6 13.0	8 17.4	3 6.5	10 21.7	46 14.0
UNE	59 40.1	10 6.8	2 1.4	11 7.5	11 7.5	36 24.5	18 12.2	147 44.8
UQ	22 33.8	2 3.1		6 9.2	22 33.8	7 10.8	6 9.2	65 19.8
WACAE	3 27.3	1 9.1		1 9.1	1 9.1	4 36.4	1 9.1	11 3.4
MURDOCH	4 50.0		1 12.5			2 25.0	1 12.5	8 2.4
MORE THAN ONE INSTIT	1 50.0					1 50.0		2 0.6
Column TOTAL	115 35.1	21 6.4	4 1.2	32 9.8	47 14.3	62 18.9	47 14.3	328 100.0

A small number of students said they thought that there was no advantage to be gained from studying a language externally. The drawbacks they expressed included lack of contact with other students and staff and that languages were difficult to acquire at a distance and in isolation. Table 26 shows responses by institution.

TABLE 26

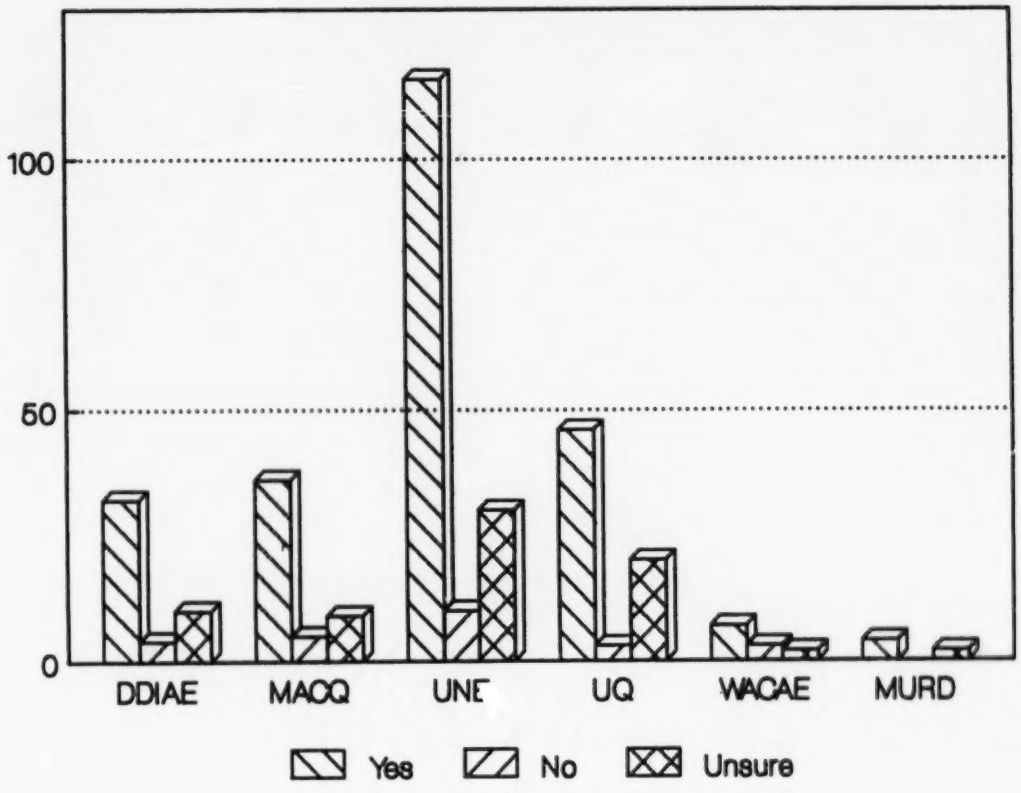
Major Disadvantages of Distance Language Learning

COUNT ROW% INSTITUTION	LACK CONTACT STAFF	LACK CONTACT STUDENTS	DIFFICULT ACQUIRE SKILL	LEARN IN ISOLATION	DIFFICULT ASSESS PROG	OTHER	MORE THAN ONE REASON	ROW TOTAL
DDIAE	6 12.0	5 10.0	6 12.0	4 8.0		10 20.0	19 38.0	50 15.2
MACQUARIE	10 22.2	2 4.4		5 11.1	1 2.2	5 11.1	22 48.9	45 13.7
UNE	14 9.4	14 9.4	15 10.1	6 4.0	1 0.7	32 21.5	67 45.0	149 45.3
UQ	5 7.9	1 1.6	5 7.9	2 3.2		4 6.3	46 73.0	63 19.1
WACAE	3 25.0			1 8.3		4 33.3	4 33.3	12 3.6
MURDOCH	1 12.5			1 12.5			6 75.0	8 2.4
Column TOTAL	39 11.9	22 6.7	26 8.0	19 5.8	2 0.6	55 16.8	164 50.2	327 100.0

Despite the drawbacks they had pointed out, most students indicated that they thought languages could be taught successfully at a distance, as Table 27 shows.

TABLE 27

Success Rating for Distance Language Teaching



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